

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1 (currently amended). A product change method for a cigarette manufacturing machine, wherein the product change includes modifying the shredded tobacco (3) fed to an input hopper (2) from an old first type (3a) to a new second type (3b), the method comprising:

feeding the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco to the input hopper (2) from a supply header (4),

feeding the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco from the input hopper (2) to at least one channel (17) for forming a bead (19) of tobacco, which is released onto a paper strip (22) travelling along a forming table (20) having a conveyor (25) for forming a continuous cigarette rod (21);

cutting off supply of said first type (3a) of tobacco to the input hopper (2);

unloading the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco from the input hopper (2), channel (17) and forming table (20) by activating automatically a deflecting member (28) arranged at an output end of the forming table (20) to deflect a waste stream (30) of shredded tobacco of the first type (3a) into container means (31) arranged at ~~an~~ the output end of the forming table (20) and by leaving the conveyor (25) of the forming table (20) running;

feeding, when the input hopper (2), channel (17) and forming table (20) are completely empty, the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco through the supply header (4), input hopper (2) and forming table (20) by leaving the conveyor (25) of the forming table (20) running;

deflecting the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco into the container means (31) arranged at the end of the forming table (20) by means of the deflecting member (28) until the forming table (20) is completely full; and

deactivating automatically the deflecting member (28) when the regular production using the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco is ready to be started.

2 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein unloading the first type (3a) of tobacco comprises arresting said paper strip (22).

3 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 2, and further comprising only starting up supply of said paper strip (22) when the manufacturing machine (1) is filled completely with said second type (3b) of shredded tobacco.

Claims 4 and 5 (canceled).

6 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the manufacturing machine (1) is filled completely with said second type (3b) of shredded tobacco in successive loads; each load being formed inside said header (4) separated from said input hopper (2), and being unloaded into said input hopper (2) by connecting said header (4) to said input hopper (2).

7 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the manufacturing machine (1) is filled completely with said second type (3b) of shredded tobacco by forming a bead (19) of the second type (3b) of tobacco along said forming table (20).

8 (original). A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein said bead (19) of the second type (3b) of tobacco is left without the relative paper strip (22) until a given desired compactness is achieved.

9 (original). A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein said bead (19) of the second type (3b) of tobacco, without the relative said paper strip (22), is deflected into container means (31).

10 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 8, wherein said paper strip (22) is fed, with the bead (19) of the second type (3b) of tobacco, along said forming table (20) to form a new type of continuous cigarette rod (21); an initial portion of said new type of continuous cigarette rod (21) being deflected into said container means (31).

11 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the supply header (4) comprises a box (5) located on top of the hopper (2) and fitted at the bottom with a shut-off valve (6) which, in the closed position, disconnects box (5) from input hopper (2).

12 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein supply header (4) comprises:

a suction conduit (10) fitted through a lateral wall (8) of the box (5) and for producing a vacuum in the box (5); and

a feed conduit (11), the outlet of which communicates with the box (5) through the lateral wall (8), and the inlet of which communicates selectively, by means of at least two valves (12a, 12b, 12c), with respective feed conduits (13a, 13b, 13c) for supplying respective different types (3a, 3b, 3c) of shredded tobacco (3).

13 (previously presented). A method as claimed in claim 12, further comprising:

keeping the shut-off valve (6) normally closed;

drawing shredded tobacco (3) up into the box (5) along the feed conduit (11) and by means of the air sucked out along the suction conduit (10) to gradually fill box (5);

detecting the level of shredded tobacco (3) inside the input hopper (2) by a level sensor (9); and

opening the shut-off valve (6) when a low level of shredded tobacco (3) inside the input hopper (2) is detected by the level sensor (9) to transfer the shredded tobacco (3a) in bulk from the box (5) to the input hopper (3).

14 (currently amended). A method as claimed in claim 12, further comprising:

keeping open a first valve (12a) through which the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco is fed when the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco is to be supplied to the input hopper (2);

keeping ~~else~~ closed a second valve (12b) through which the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco is fed when the first type (3b) of shredded tobacco is to be supplied to the input hopper (2);

keeping ~~else~~ closed the first valve (12a) through which the first type (3a) of shredded tobacco is fed when the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco is to be supplied to the input hopper (2); and

keeping open the second valve (12b) through which the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco is fed when the second type (3b) of shredded tobacco is to be supplied to the input hopper (2).